SHANDA FANTASY ARTS

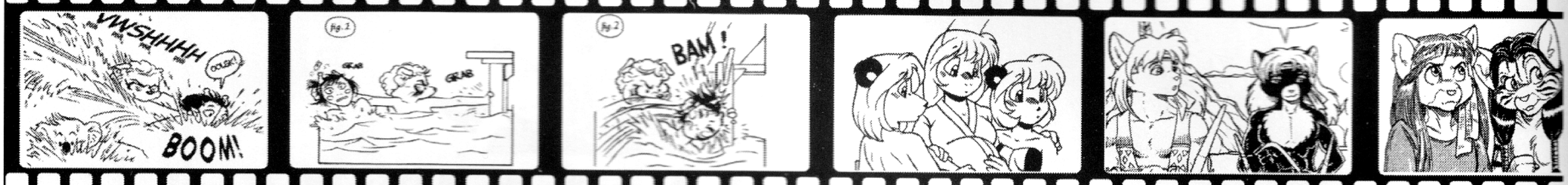
5 APRIL 2005

$4.99

MATURE READERS

KATMANDU ANNUAL

Comet '04



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The INNER CIRCLE

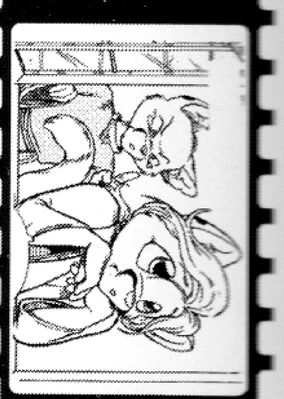
Will Eisner died recently. To many comic fans, he was "the guy that did THE SPIRIT." To us in independent comics, he was the inventor of our industry. Many magazines and comics will be running tributes, and I even have my Will Eisner story running in one of those. But you see, we've been running a tribute to Will Eisner even before there was a Shanda Fantasy Arts and now it's time to reveal it.

When I was running a theater in Cedar Rapids Iowa, developing the idea of SHANDA THE PANDA, most of the city's theater managers would gather after work for a friendly drink at a tavern within walking distance of my theater. I liked the idea of a nearby bar and put Terri there in SHANDA.

The name of the bar was DOLAN'S. Of course, it immediately made me think of Commissioner Dolan in Eisner's THE SPIRIT and I thought it was a good omen. . But for SHANDA, I decided to change the name to probably the best character in THE SPIRIT.

So, since MU Press published SHANDA THE PANDA #1, long before Shanda Fantasy Arts was a thought, Terri the cricket has been working at EBONY'S, where they're raising a mug to Will Eisner tonight.

Mike and Carole



www.shandafantasyarts.net

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Katmandu

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Katmandu

STORY BY CAROLE CURTIS
ARTWORK BY DR. COMET

THE GIRLS WHO LOVED THE MOON

WHY SO QUIET, KITTENS? YOUR MOTHER NOT GIVE YOU ENOUGH TO DO?

IT'S TOO HOT TO DO ANYTHING, HESTA. MOTHER SONNA WAS GOING TO TELL US A STORY.

HEY, HESTA, YOU TRAVEL A LOT! I BET *YOU* KNOW SOME GOOD STORIES!

LETTERING BY FENDER

LET'S SEE...I KNOW A STORY ABOUT TWO SISTERS. WOULD YOU LIKE TO HEAR IT?

YEAH! AND YOU CAN SHARE OUR SNACK!

OKAY--THIS STORY TAKES PLACE IN THE TIME OF THE FIRST PEOPLE...

THERE WAS A FAMILY BLESSED BY THE MOTHER OF ALL WITH THREE BRAVE TALL SONS AND TWO BEAUTIFUL TWIN DAUGHTERS. BOTH **ARLAIS** AND **ARWEDEN** WERE MODEST, KIND, AND CLEVER, ABLE TO COOK AND SEW, AND CARE WELL FOR THE FAMILY'S BELONGINGS.

"THE FATHER AND SONS WERE SKILLED, BOLD HUNTERS AND ALWAYS BROUGHT MEAT FOR THE COOK FIRE. MANY WARRIORS AND BRAVE HUNTERS CAME TO ASK FOR THE DAUGHTERS IN MARRIAGE, BUT THE MOTHER AND FATHER SAW NO NEED TO SEND THEM OFF TO OTHERS' TENTS."

"THE GIRLS WOULD GIGGLE WHEN THE WARRIORS AND HUNTERS WOULD ASK FOR THEM, BUT NO ONE EVER CAUGHT THEIR EYES."

"THE GIRLS WOULD GO OUT EACH NIGHT TO WATCH THE MOON TRAVEL ACROSS THE SKY. THEY SAW HIS GLOWING FACE AND WERE CAUGHT BY THE BEAUTY OF THE MOONBEAMS OF HIS HAIR TRAILING THROUGH THE CLOUDS."

"EACH FOUND A LONGING WITHIN HER FOR THE HANDSOME GOD OF THE MOON."

"FOR MANY MONTHS THEY STAYED OUT EVERY NIGHT, WATCHING HIM COME NEAR THE WORLD, THEN TRAVEL FAR AWAY, THE MOON WANING UNTIL IT DISAPPEARED."

"THEY CALLED TO THE MOON EACH NIGHT AND ASKED HIM TO MARRY THEM. BUT HE NEVER ANSWERED."

"THE SEASONS PASSED AND THE YEAR BEGAN AGAIN. ARLAIS AND ARWEDEN BEGAN TO GROW PALE AND WAN. THEY TENDED THE FIRE AND CARED FOR THE FAMILY BUT THEY BECAME QUIET AND WITHDRAWN. THEY NO LONGER DANCED IN BEAUTY AROUND THE FIRE WITH THEIR BROTHERS AND FRIENDS."

"THEY WATCHED THE MOON AND PINED FOR HIS PRESENCE."

"THEIR MOTHER AND FATHER DISCUSSED THIS WITH THEIR BROTHERS. THE BROTHERS THEN DECIDED TO GO ON A QUEST TO THE DWELLING PLACE OF THE MOON AND TELL HIM OF THEIR SISTERS' DESIRE TO MARRY.'

"THEY TRAVELED FOR MANY MONTHS, CHASING THE MOON AS HE DWINDLED IN THE SKY."

"YOUNGEST BROTHER SHOT A SINEW-TIED ARROW, ENTANGLING WITH THE MOONLIGHT IN THE CLOUDS. THEY HAULED HIM DOWN BY HIS LONG, GLEAMING HAIR."

"ANGRY, MOON RAISED HIS HAND TO STRIKE, BUT ELDER BROTHER CRIED, 'WAIT! WE COME FOR ARLAIS AND ARWEDEN! THEY WISH TO MARRY YOU!'"

"'THROUGH THE SEASONS, THEY TOUCH MY LONELINESS. I WILL TAKE THEM TO WIFE IN THE SPRING, IF THEY CAN LISTEN AND OBEY.'"

"'GO, TELL THEM TO PREPARE.'"

"THEY HURRIED HOME WITH THE NEWS. THEY PREPARED FOR THE WEDDING BY HUNTING, GATHERING, DRYING AND STORING GOOD FOOD FOR THE CELEBRATION. NEW BASKETS, CORDS, DRESSES, AND A TENT WERE MADE."

"SPRING CAME. ARLAIS AND ARWEDEN WATCHED THE MOON DRAW CLOSER EACH NIGHT."

"THE MOON CAME DOWN ON THE NIGHT WHEN HIS LIGHT SHONE AT ITS MOST FULL. HE BROUGHT METAL KNIVES AND RIDING LIZARDS WITH GLOWING SPOTS ON THEIR FOREHEADS FOR THE FATHER AND BROTHERS. HE BROUGHT TWO PACK LIZARDS FOR THE MOTHER, EACH LOADED WITH FURS, BASKETS OF TENDER GRAINS, A NEW COOKING POT OF METAL, AND PAINTS MADE FROM COLORED EARTH."

"THE FEASTING LASTED THROUGHOUT THE NIGHT AND THE NEXT DAY. ON THE THIRD DAY THE MOON TOOK EACH GIRL BY THE HAND AND SAID, 'WE WILL GO TO MY HOME NOW. BOTH OF YOU MUST HOLD TIGHTLY TO MY HANDS AND NOT OPEN YOUR EYES UNTIL WE ARE HOME. I WILL MARRY THE MORE PATIENT ONE, AND THE OTHER WILL BE RETURNED HOME.'"

"THEY FELT THE COOL MIST OF THE CLOUDS AND THE WARMTH OF THE SHOOTING STARS AS THEY MOVED ACROSS THE SKY."

"ARWEDEN GRABBED HER, HOLDING ON UNTIL THEY REACHED MOON'S HOME."

"ARLAIS OPENED HER EYES AND MOON LET GO. SHE FELL TOWARD EARTH."

"THEY PLEADED WITH THE FURIOUS MOON TO KEEP THEM BOTH. HE AGREED, BUT WARNED THEM OF MANY DANGERS."

"THEY AGREED TO LISTEN AND OBEY, AND LIVED IN HARMONY FOR MANY YEARS."

"MOON HAD TOLD THEM A WITCH WHO LIVED ACROSS THE RIVER WOULD KILL THEM IF THEY CROSSED IT TO LOOK FOR HER TREASURES. ONE NIGHT, ARWEDEN'S CURIOUSITY LED HER THERE, HIDING UNTIL THE OLD WOMAN HAD LEFT HER TEEPEE."

"ARWEDEN FOUND SMALL PIECES OF THE MOON - A QUARTER, A HALF, AND THE MOST BEAUTIFUL FULL MOON, WHICH SHE PUT ON TO ADMIRE."

"IT WOULD NOT COME OFF."

"THEY CUT THEIR HAIR IN BANGS TO DISGUISE IT, BUT MOON SAW THE GLOW FROM THE DOORWAY WHEN HE RETURNED HOME."

"HE WAS ANGRY, AND THREATENED TO SEND ARWEDEN BACK TO HER PARENTS. ARLAIS AND ARWEDEN ASKED HIS FORGIVENESS. "THE MOON SAW THEIR LOVE FOR EACH OTHER AND FOR HIM. 'I WILL NOT SEND YOU HOME, BUT TO ANOTHER TENT.' ARWEDEN LEFT, CRYING BITTERLY."

HE CREATED THE OUTER MOON FOR HER HOME. THE SISTERS CAN VISIT ONLY AT THE TWIN MOONS, WHEN BOTH MOONS ARE TOGETHER AND THE SAME SIZE IN THE SKY.

MAYBE SOMEDAY *YOU* SISTERS WILL BE LUCKY ENOUGH TO GET A HUSBAND LIKE HIM.

HUH, LIKE I'D SHARE A HUSBAND WITH *HER*!

SAME HERE!

Neko

"Loss"
By
Chakat 'Kit' Stripedfur

Dearest Liska.

I have loved you always, since before the fight over the waterskin, yet I have been unable to tell you until now.

I have watched as Rial took you to his bed, aching to do the same; yet forced to keep my feelings hidden.

Now he is gone, and my heart aches for a different reason. I was always jealous of my brother for having you as a mate, but somehow that doesn't seem important anymore.

We mourn, and I am forced to say good-bye to the best life long friend, childhood playmate, and brother I have ever known.

I know it is too soon for you, and you want me to accept you merely as mate and not wife, yet I love you so much more than that.

I can only hope that, with time, you can come to love me as I love you; and not just as father to your kits.

Until then I must be content just to share your furs at night, and hope that one day you will return my love.

Love always,

Pyndan.

MOMMY, TELL US A STORY.

I'LL TELL YOU ONE OF LISKA'S TIME. WILL THAT BE ALRIGHT?

THERE WAS A GREAT RIVER THAT FLOWED THROUGH THE LAND. IT WAS USED BY ALL THE TRIBES FOR WATER, FISHING, AND FOR HUNTING WHEN THE ANIMALS CAME TO DRINK. BUT THE RIVER CHANGED, AND BECAME DANGEROUS.

FIRST THEY FOUND ANIMALS KILLED AND NO ONE KNEW WHAT HAD DONE IT...

KATMANDU:
COMES A STRANGER

STORY BY JON C. CRUSOE
ART AND TEXT BY SARAH SILVERMAN

THEN MEMBERS OF ANOTHER TRIBE CAME.

...AND WHEN PAVO DID NOT RETURN FROM HIS FISHING, WE KNEW SOMETHING HAD HAPPENED TO HIM.

WAS THERE NO SIGN?

WE FOUND HIS BROKEN FISH SPEAR, AND SOME BLOOD, BUT NOTHING ELSE.

PYDAN, GET BACK TO CAMP AND WARN EVERYONE TO STAY AWAY FROM RIVER UNLESS THEY COME IN A GROUP WITH WARRIORS.

COME. BE OUR GUESTS FOR THE NIGHT. IT SEEMS IT IS DANGEROUS TO TRAVEL THE RIVER NOW.

WE ACCEPT WITH THANKS, WARRIOR.

SOMETHING THERE...?

LISKA, THERE'S A STRANGER IN THE CAMP. THEY'VE CALLED A COUNCIL.

HISSS

HMM, COME WITH US TO COUNCIL, FRIENDS. THIS MAY CONCERN YOUR TRIBE AS WELL.

HERE NOW WHAT THIS ONE HAS TO SAY. HE HAS TRAVELED FAR TO BE HERE. HIS MEDICINE IS STRONG AND I SAY HE IS OUR FRIEND.

I AM OCOEE. I AM FROM LANDS FAR IN THE DIRECTION OF THE RISING SUN. I HAVE TRAVELED ITS MANY RISINGS TO REACH YOU. IN MY TRAVELS IN THE SPIRIT WORLD, I HAVE FOUND THAT A TERRIBLE BEING HAS COME TO YOU.

DOES THIS BEING LIVE IN THE RIVER? IF IT IS SO, THEN OUR OTHER GUESTS HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY.

WE HAVE FOUND ANIMALS DEAD ALONG THE RIVER FOR MANY WEEKS. NOW, ONE OF OUR WARRIORS IS MISSING AND WE FEAR THAT HE HAS BEEN KILLED BY SOMETHING IN THE RIVER.

IT IS AS MY MEDICINE HAS SHOWN ME. THE TIE-SNAKE HAS COME AMONG YOU.

TIE-SNAKE? WHAT IS A TIE-SNAKE?

LET US SIT AND I WILL TELL YOU OF THE TIE-SNAKE.

FIRST, THE TIE-SNAKE IS DANGEROUS, VERY DANGEROUS. HE IS OF THE LOWER WORLD, NOT THIS WORLD.

HE CATCHES PEOPLE IN HIS TAIL AND CRUSHES THEM. AND IF HE BITES SOMEONE, THAT ONE GETS SICK.

SO SICK THAT EVEN THE MEDICINE MEN MIGHT NOT BE ABLE TO HEAL.

ITS HEAD IS LARGE AND SHAPED LIKE A POISONOUS RIVER SNAKE, BUT IT HAS ANTLERS LIKE A NORIK. AND IN THE CENTER, BETWEEN THE ANTLERS, IS A BRIGHT CRYSTAL.

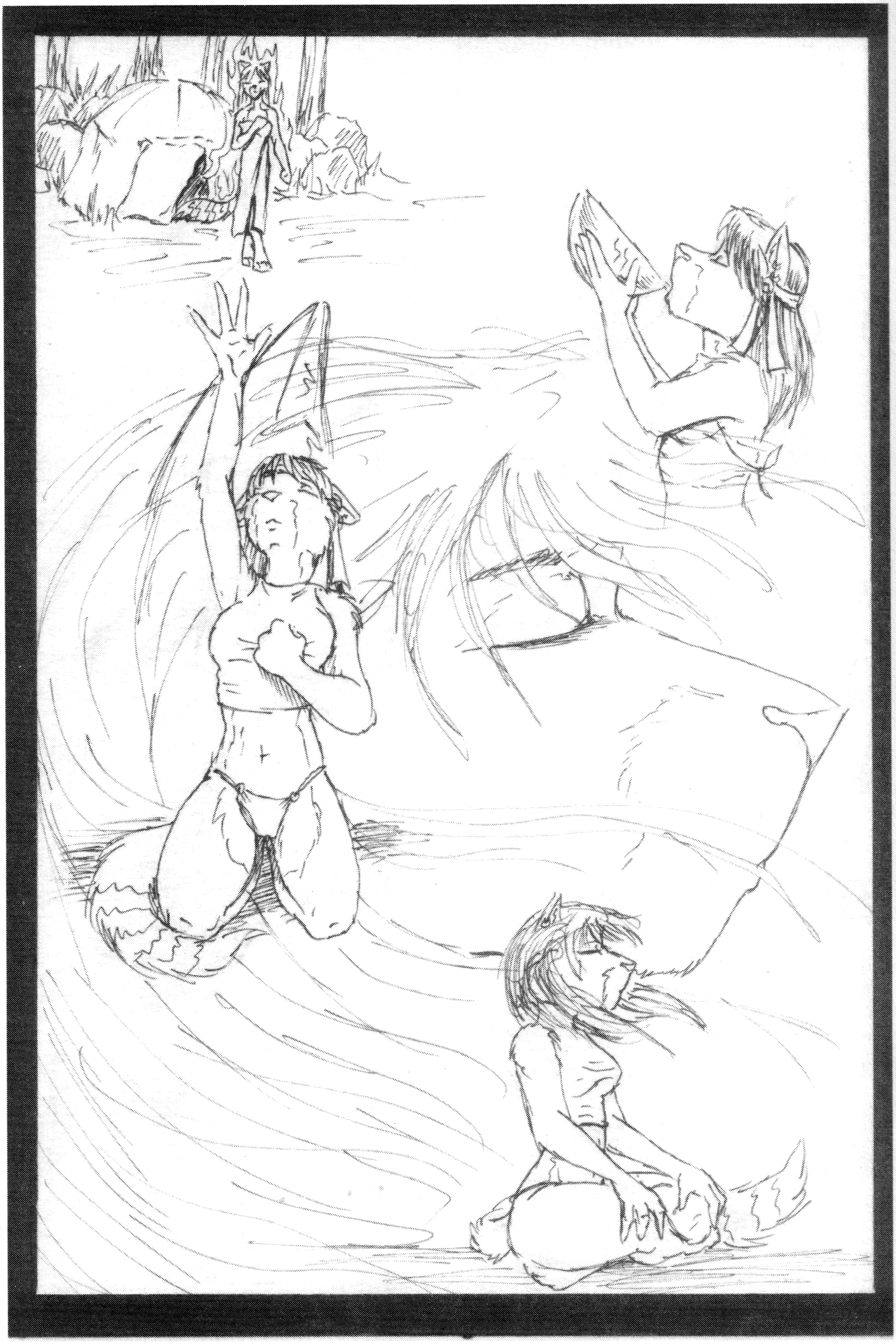
AND HOW MAY TIE-SNAKE BE DESTROYED?

MY MEDICINE WILL GUIDE ME TO CHOOSE ONE WARRIOR TO FIGHT TIE-SNAKE. A PERSON CANNOT KILL TIE-SNAKE, BUT A PERSON CAN HURT HIM ENOUGH THAT HE FLEES BACK TO THE LOWER WORLD.

YOU! BUT WAIT- YOU HAVE NO SPIRIT GUIDE. YOU HAVE NOT YET GONE ON A SPIRIT GUIDE QUEST.

I HAVE ALWAYS FELT THAT THE SPIRIT GUIDE QUEST WAS NOT FOR ME, BUT NOW...

BUT NOW YOU FEEL IT IS SOMETHING YOU MUST DO FOR YOUR PEOPLE. GOOD!



NOW YOU ARE READY

I DO NOT KNOW MY SPIRIT GUIDE. I ONLY HEARD A VOICE SAY TO GO AND DO WHAT I MUST.

THEN THAT IS WHAT YOU MUST DO.

ONE MORE WARNING FOR YOU. IF THE TIE-SNAKE SPEAKS, BE CAREFUL. DO NOT BELIEVE EVERYTHING IT SAYS. IT WILL MIX TRUTH WITH LIES TO TRICK YOU.

AND IF IT TRICKS THE RIGHT WAY, IT WILL HAVE YOU.

HE COMES!

CALL ME EAGLE, FOR I AM THE MESSANGER OF HES' AKA' DUM ESEE', THE BREATH MAKER, THE GIVER AND TAKER OF LIFE AND I KILL SNAKES...

THIS IS A DANGEROUS THING. POWERFUL AND DANGEROUS. I WILL TEACH YOU IT'S USE BEFORE I GO.

MY SPIRIT GUIDE IS EAGLE?

THE CRYSTAL CAN BRING YOU AND YOUR PEOPLE HAPPINES THROUGH THE YEARS. EVEN THOSE THINGS THAT SEEM WRONG OR BAD WILL ONE DAY TURN GOOD WITH THE CRYSTAL.

SO THEY HAD A GREAT CELEBRATION TO HONOR LISKA. OCOEE KEPT HIS WORD AND TAUGHT HER TO USE THE CRYSTAL TO HELP HER PEOPLE. THEN OCOEE, WHO HAD COME AS A STRANGER, LEFT AS A FRIEND... TO RETURN HOME.

WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

EVERYBODY WENT TO BED. NOW YOU DO THE SAME.

THAT WAS A GREAT STORY. I ALMOST WISH IT HAD REALLY HAPPENED.

AND HOW DO YOU KNOW IT DIDN'T?

WELL IF IT HAD, YOU MIGHT SAY OUR MEETING THE WAY WE DID WAS CAUSED BY THE CRYSTAL.

MAYBE IT WAS DEAR. MAYBE IT WAS.

THE END.

"I am EAGLE" Lithe ©Carole Curtis

Kamandi

Changes
part 1

STORY, PENCILS, LETTERS:
TED VOLLMER
INKS:
SHANE FISHER

IN THE MARKETPLACE OF TYRE, THE SMELL OF SMOKE, FOOD, AND EXOTIC PERFUMES RISES ABOVE THE SOUND OF VOICES ENGAGED IN THE GAME OF BARTER...

A GAME THAT TRADER KIO HAVERSIN IS LOSING BADLY...

JUST LOOK AT THE WORKMANSHIP ON THIS BELT. HOW TIGHT THE STITCHING IS, HOW COLORFUL THE BEADS...

HMM... VERY NICE...

I'LL GIVE YOU ONE SAPHIRE FOR IT.

ONE!?

BUT SIR! IMAGINE THE DAYS OF WORK! HOURS SPENT POLISHING EACH BEAD! IT'S WORTH AT LEAST *FIVE* SAPHIRES!

UH-OH, SOUNDS LIKE KIO'S NOT DOING TOO WELL. ISN'T THAT THE FIRST SIGN?

OF HIS WANDERLUST? YES...

...LIKE ALWAYS. NEXT FRUSTRATION, *THEN* HAIR PULLING. I HOPE I DON'T SEE THAT. I WANT TO SETTLE DOWN AND RAISE A FAMILY.

YOU AND KIO? A FAMILY? *GIGGLE* WAKE UP, SENNI!

WHY NOT, MILIA? KIO WILL GROW OUT OF HIS WANDERLUST. THIS MAY BE THE YEAR HE DOES.

BESIDES...

...AS LONG AS HE DOESN'T START PULLING HAIR...

OOPS!

LOOKS LIKE YOU SPOKE TOO SOON.

TWO! I CAN'T BELIEVE I SETTLED FOR *TWO!*

ANOTHER YEAR?

THAT'S OKAY. I'LL MISS YOU.

SIT DOWN AND RELAX...

WE'LL PACK TONIGHT, THEN MAKE OUR WAY TO *RAMASHA* IN THE MORNING.

YOU KNOW ME *TOO* WELL.

...I KNOW...

YOUR SPECIAL PLACE! TONIGHT WE'LL CAMP HERE.

AND HERE'S THE TREE!

WHAT IS WITH YOU AND THAT TREE?

NOT *THAT* TREE, *THE* TREE!

THIS TREE IS *MY LANDMARK!* FROM HERE I CAN FIND MY WAY ANYWHERE IN HOPLITE LANDS. I'LL *NEVER* GET LOST!

SHE'S RIGHT, THAT TREE MAKES A GOOD LANDMARK. I USE IT TOO.

CERTAIN PEOPLE GET LOST EASILY WITHOUT SOME SORT OF REFERENCE. I'M GUESSING YOU'RE ONE OF THEM?

FRIEND, YOU DON'T KNOW THE *HALF* OF IT!

KIO!

bap!

WHY WERE YOU HIDING IN THE GRASS?

HIDING?

M'LADY, NATURE'S CALL CAN *NOT* BE DENIED!

EEP!

HE *HAD* TO REMIND ME! IT *WAS* A LONG RIDE.

DON'T GO TO FAR, OKAY?

DON'T WORRY, I WON'T.

YES, DEA
OKAY, DE
NO, DEA

-KIO HAVERSIN.

...RECK.

ARE YOU HUNGRY, RECK?

NO, I ATE EARLIER.

FINE. I AM, THOUGH.

IT LOOKS LIKE THE WEATHER MAY TURN BAD...

NO! IT'S TOO SOON!

KIO!

...YOU ARE WELCOME TO SHARE THIS CAMPSITE WITH US.

SOUNDS LIKE MY WIFE FOUND SOMETHING, OR A BUG FOUND HER.

CHUCKLE

STAY HERE, FRIEND, I'LL FIND OUT WHAT'S WRONG.

I DON'T THINK SO, "FRIEND"

TO BE CONTINUED...

"Passion"
By
Chakat 'Kit' Stripedfur

Your eyes, like the purest of sapphires, shine with the brilliance of the moon, sparkling like the stars themselves amidst a backdrop of velvet.

Like pools of liquid ice they draw me into their coolness, refreshing me like a cool winter breeze.

Your lips, like the sun itself, hot enough to melt the coldest of hearts.

Igniting a fire within me that all the water in the world cannot quench, fueling my passion 'till it roars with the heat of a thousand suns.

Your throat, infinitely delicate, begs to kissed by my lips, eagerly nuzzling every inch as I nip gently at your color bone.

Your breasts, supple and softer than silk, press gently against me as we cuddle at night. Our arms encircling each other and drawing us close.

Your stomach stretches out before me as my mouth licks and kisses ever lower, pointing the way to my destination.

The mound of flesh and fur between your legs, giving off a scent both exotic and exhilarating, playfully hides the treasure I seek within.

My tongue darts out to taste, and I hear a quiet moan escape your lips as I lovingly explore your gift to me, delighting in your taste and smell.

Moving my way back up you body, I leave a trail of kisses behind me until I reach your mouth once more, claiming your lips in a fiery kiss.

A loud moan my only words I slowly enter you, breathing in your scent as you take me in, our bodies moving together in a rhythm as old as time itself.

"Lost in the motion, caught up in the dance, we notice only the moment, our bodies in a trance.
Swaying to the music, reason come undone, forever linked together, two hearts beat as one.
Comming to the moment, sanity erodes, cannot stop the motion, electricity explodes.
Our breathing is slowing, energy surrounds, comforting in its warmth, heartbeats coming down.
Lost in the motion, caught up in the dance, we notice only the moment, our bodies in a trance.
Swaying to the music, reason come undone, forever linked together, two hearts beat as one."

"Windflower and Bright Raven © Carole Curtis"

Striped Feathers and Spotted Fur part one:
Fallen from the Sky

by Rauhnee Ranshanka and Todd McCall
Fur-and-Fantasy@furholt.net
http://www.furholt.net/Fur-and-Fantasy

"Easy, warrior." A soft but firm male voice was the first thing Blitz was aware of as consciousness grudgingly returned to his battered body.

"What the?" He started as he looked around the tent, seeking the body that went with the voice. The last thing he could remember was the ground coming up way too fast, and the recon craft was breaking up.

"Relax, you were badly injured." The hand on his chest, strong and gentle at the same time, linked voice and form as he was urged to lie back down. He focused on the stranger, a slender male in early adulthood with chocolate brown stripes on a rich brown base. Long fur and extremely feline features marked him as unlikely to be of any known race.

"How long have I been out?" The Lynx Felsin asked curiously, since the only really noticeable injury was the fact that he was sore all over. Nothing broken and no internal injuries, both of which spoke to him either having been unconscious for weeks or some very advanced healing.

"Almost three days," he answered, his tone clear that he considered that a dangerously long time. "Do you feel up for drinking a little broth?"

"Only three days?" Blitz asked, trying to reconcile that with the injuries he knew had to have resulted from the crash. One of the things a NightBlade couldn't ignore was when things stopped making sense around him, and things were definitely not making sense. His stomach at that point decided it was tired of being ignored and grumbled noisily at him. "I guess I do." He chuckled weakly.

"Three days under Mother Sahuna's care," the younger male added as if it explained everything. "That is a very long time, even for as badly injured as you were." He added and lifted a bowl of fragrant meat broth to the Lynx's mouth. "Did you really fall from the sky?"

Blitz considered for a moment as he sipped at the broth. "Thank you, that's really good." He smiled and got as lightly shyer one in return. "And yeah, I guess I did. Who's Mother Sahuna?" He asked curiously, though he figured she must be the local Healer.

"She is the most skilled healer for a year's journey." He said proudly and tipped the bowl so Blitz could drink a little more. "And my mother."

"She's good, that's for sure." Blitz nodded before accepting the broth. "Injuries like mine should've taken at least a week to heal, and that'd be with seriously intensive treatment."

"Most healers would not have been able to at all." He admitted softly. "You were very lucky you fell so close to our camp, and our warriors found you before raiders did. As handsome as your fur is, it looks much better on you, than as a pelt in someone's tent."

"I definitely agree, and thank you." Blitz said, amazed that someone actually collected the pelt of sentient beings. That was a practice he'd only heard vague rumors of happening on some of the outlying worlds of the Alliance. "I really didn't want to end my career as a rug, or a coat."

"Most likely a blanket," the tabby smiled shyly as their fingers touched around the bowl. "You must make an incredibly warm blanket."

"I've had a few people tell me that." Blitz smiled. "Though they weren't usually talking the kind you can fold up and put on a shelf when not needed." He chuckled, wondering at the shy smile a little.

"I meant as the living kind." He giggled lightly. "You're far too handsome to be a pelt."

"Thank you." Blitz smiled. "You're pretty hansom yourself." He added, as he fumbled for a name and the youth definitely blushed under his dark fur. "My name's Blitz, by the way. What's yours, if you don't mind my asking."

"Oh!" He blinked, clearly startled. "I'm so sorry. I totally forgot my manners. I'm Crystal-At-Dawn." he dropped his eyes a bit. "But you are welcome to call me Dawn."

"That's okay, Dawn." Blitz smiled reassuringly. "Took me a while to remember as well. I tend to leave my manners at home." He grinned.

"Mother Sahuna would have my whiskers if she knew I was so rude to a guest of the Chief." Dawn half joked. "Does anything hurt, or are you just sore all over?"

"Just sore all over, thank Felsira." Blitz smiled appreciatively. "It should hurt a lot more than that. And don't worry, I won't tell." He grinned secretively. "Guest of the Chief, huh? I don't usually rate that kind of treatment."

"She has a tendency to take in strays," Dawn smiled with both respect and admiration. "Especially injured ones she thinks are good warriors or wives. She is a very good judge of a stranger's worth, even when they can not speak."

"A very useful trait in a leader." Blitz nodded approvingly. "Ebon's pretty good at it too."

"It is why she is our chief," Dawn urged the Lynx to drink the last of the warm broth. "Well, that and she is undefeated in battle."

Blitz willingly finished off the broth and then smiled. "Undefeated, huh? That's a pretty impressive record." He said with honest admiration. Given the level of tech he didn't see, he figured that was a pretty crucial trait for a leader.

"Yes, it is," Dawn smiled wistfully and set the bowl out of the way. "I wished she liked males enough to consider one for a wife."

He blinked almost instantly and blushed a deep red under his dark fur. "I did not just say that."

"Of course you didn't." Blitz said easily. "You must use the term wife differently then I'm used to, I've never heard it applied to a male before." He said, his curiosity piqued by the odd usage.

"Not many males want to be one," Dawn admitted. "But not many females are warriors either. A warrior's wife is who tends their tent, cooks meals, bears and cares for the kits. At least if they've chosen to marry. In some camps warriors will have slaves and bedslaves for that, but the chief has forbidden it here." He explained quietly. "She was captured as a slave when she was young. She's never let go of hating it."

"And I applaud her for forbidding it." Blitz said approvingly, liking this Chief a bit more. Slavery was something the Shadow Government permitted that Blitz despised, probably because on a least some level, he felt like one at times.

"Good," Dawn relaxed a bit. "Many warriors and traders can't understand that, much less why. Many no longer come to this camp because of her choices, but everyone here agrees with her."

"Probably a good thing I crashed were I did." Blitz said quietly. "I'd have gotten into real trouble somewhere that practiced slavery."

The dark tabby regarded him for a quiet moment.

"I think you hate it more than she does."

"That may be, Dawn." Blitz acknowledged. "But it's partially 'cause I'm frustrated at being stranded." He explained. "Don't get me wrong, I appreciate what's been done for me. But not being able to get home; isn't easy to accept. And slavery would give me something to take that frustration out on, which would get me in trouble."

"That is true," he nodded softly. "I would hate to be stuck somewhere so far from home." He smiled shyly again. "Maybe you'll find a home here, until you can return to your wife."

"Well, I like the company so far." The Lynx smiled. "As for my wife, well my people don't really use the term. However, I'm not mated to anyone currently."

"Oh," Dawn tried not to brighten too much. "Do you feel well enough to try a little solid food? Even the Chief enjoys my cooking, and her first wife is the best."

"Actually, yes I am." Blitz smiled appreciatively. "Being injured always makes me hungry." He explained, as he noted the sensation he associated with his body repairing the remaining damage. "As long as it's not keeping you from something else you should be doing." He added, remembering his manners for once.

"Taking care of you is what I am supposed to be doing," Dawn said easily and moved about the relatively small space with an ease of living all his life in it. "The stew will be ready in a couple hours, but the bread is fresh from this morning and the berries I picked myself." He added with a definite sense of pride as a small plate of flat bread and dark red berries was put together.

"It would be good to drink as much broth as you can." Dawn added, clearly repeating what he had been told countless times.

"Thank you." Blitz said with a smile, as he tried the bread and the berries and found them quite acceptable. There was something different about them, but the Lynx marked that up to his being accustomed to highly processed food. He paused for a moment as he realized he didn't have a clue what would be safe and what wouldn't, but he decided to trust to the apparent similarities in biology. This wasn't, he hoped, going to be a case where something harmless to the natives was lethal to aliens. "It's very good." He said appreciatively. and got an instant winning, if bashful, smile in return.

"Thank you, warrior." He said a little more formally, even as the Lynx could hear someone approach outside the leather walls of the tent. "Mother Sahuna probably wants to make sure you are recovering properly."

"Every Healer usually does at some point." Blitz grinned as a lean shekat, almost completely gray with age, slipped into the tent with a grace that belied her advanced age.

"It is good to see you finally awake, and eating, warrior." She smiled and knelt next to the Lynx. "I am Mother Sahuna, the healer for this camp."

"Dawn tells me I have you to thank for my remarkable recovery." Blitz said politely. "Thank you, Mother Sahuna." He said sincerely, actually feeling something other than aggravation toward a Healer.

"Not used to liking healers?" She chuckled softly. "I would like to check my work, if you do not mind."

"The ones back home are aggravating most of the time." Blitz admitted. "I don't mind." He said easily.

She nodded and lifted the tanned fur blanket from him, leaving him naked to her knowing hands and eyes. It also gave Dawn a good look, something he was trying not to be too obvious about despite the deepening blush.

"You are taking to the healing very well." She smiled in approval. "I expect you will be well enough to join the regular evening meal by tomorrow."

"I've always healed quick." Blitz smiled. "Which is handy, 'cause I'm lousy at doing the 'stay in bed and rest' thing." He added with a grin, though his tone was still polite.

"I have yet to meet the warrior who was." The old woman chuckled softly. "Has my daughter been treating you well?" She nodded at Dawn.

"Daughter?" Blitz looked decidedly confused. He was sure that Dawn was male, but daughter was a term for a female kit. There was something going on here that he just didn't get, and it was beginning to get a bit of a headache from it.

"I've taken the female role, so I get called one by most." Dawn explained softly.

"Right." Blitz said, accepting it as he had stranger things on alien worlds. He really didn't get it, but then the Felsin had abandoned most artificial gender roles centuries before he'd been born. "I hope you won't be offended if I don't." He said quietly. "'Cause I'm not sure I'll ever get the hang of using female terms for a male." He added, leaving unsaid the fact that he wasn't sure he really wanted to.

"I'm not," Dawn smiled shyly. "It just helps those who don't get that not all males who are not warriors are slaves."

"Good. I try not to offend people who've been good to me." Blitz said seriously. "And you have been, Dawn."

"Excellent," Mother Sahuna smiled at the statement even as Dawn ducked his head a bit. "I'm sure he can see to your meals until you have established a tent for yourself here." She glanced at the bashful tom. "Perhaps longer, if you like."

"Mother!" Dawn protested ineffectively as she slipped away.

"If I were back home I'd say that was a brief attempt at matchmaking by your mother." Blitz commented dryly.

Dawn ducked his head slightly and blushed. "It is." He sighed. "It is her way of pointing out I'm available."

Blitz chuckled. "I'd kind figured that out for myself. But it's a good thing that the village healer thinks I'm good enough for her kit."

"True," he smiled back shyly. "She doesn't give approval easily. Especially not for her youngest, or most gifted."

"It's actually kind of embarrassing." Blitz grinned. "I mean, I've been unconscious since I arrived, and yet your Chief thinks I'm worth keeping around, and your mother is matchmaking. This could really go to a guy's head." He chuckled playfully.

"Well, she's matchmaking because you caught my eye." Dawn admitted shyly. "The chief, well, you are *clearly* a warrior of some skill."

"Among other things." Blitz grinned. "And I'm flattered." He added quietly. It wasn't as if he had lacked for attention, quite the opposite. He'd been with more casual lovers than he could count easily, but no one had ever been more than that. But something here said

that maybe Dawn was worth more time that just a casual encounter, and that was something the Lynx wasn't entirely sure what to do with.

It wasn't something he'd have to rush into either, given his lack of a way off the planet, and the months before help would arrive, assuming it was reasonably easy to figure out just where in space he was to those still at home.

"Well, you are amazing." Dawn spoke with a soft certainty that didn't match his apparent youth or knowledge of the Lynx. "It's hard not to notice."

"I am good at what I do." Blitz admitted. "But I didn't think it was so obvious." He added quietly. Being the smallest of the NightBlades he was usually the one who got underestimated which was an advantage he didn't mind playing on.

"It is when you have the Sight." Dawn said softly. "Like I do."

"Talented as well as cute." Blitz said with playful smile. "You're just full of surprises."

"Thank you," he ducked his head again. "More broth?"

"You're welcome." Blitz smiled softly. "And yes, thank you. Its very good."

"Cooking is an important skill for a wife to have," Dawn commented more easily as Blitz drank. "It is difficult to keep a happy tent when the meals do not go down well."

"Every household needs someone who can cook." Blitz agreed easily. "And better still if the person actually enjoys it."

"It has always been one of my better skills," he smiled shyly again. "There are clothes for you to wear," he hesitated a moment, unsure of himself. "It is considered polite to cover your sex here."

"It is most places." Blitz said easily. "Clothes would be appreciated."

"I doubt they are what you are used to," Dawn said softly as he twisted to snag a small bundle of soft leather. "But there was little time to make anything."

"I doubt that what I'm used to is worn around here." Blitz said easily, as he accepted the bundle. "This will work quite nicely." He said, slipping the loincloth on and tying it around the base of his snug tail as if it was what he'd worn all his life. "Much better."

"It does look very good on you," Dawn almost purred. "Though it will look better with a vest and strong shoes. Have you lived off your own hunting often?"

"Often enough that I know what I'm doing." Blitz nodded. "Though my clothes making isn't nearly as good."

"Oh," he blinked in surprise. "You are used to living on your own, then. Most warriors trade some of their catch for such things, if they don't have a wife or daughter to make them."

"I don't know if your people have the equivalent, but I'm a scout for my tribe." Blitz explained. "I have to be able to look after myself for weeks or months, without support at times."

"Not as a position, but some of the warriors do that," he nodded easily and offered Blitz a third bowl of broth. "It seems like such lonely work, to be away from your tent so long."

"It can be." Blitz nodded. "Fortunately, most of the missions aren't so long, or isolated. A lot of the time I'm actually scouting out cities." He explained, as he accepted the bowl and drank from it.

That made Dawn pause for a moment. "Like a very big camp?"

"A very, very big camp." Blitz nodded. "Sometimes they're so big that it takes a couple days to walk from one side to the other."

"How can the land support such a gathering for any length of time?" He asked in shock, trying to think of something that huge.

"Well, that's difficult to explain without getting into modern farming and livestock raising." Blitz said simply. "But the cities have been where they are for a long time."

The dark tabby paused for a quiet moment. "Most families do not hunt their own food?"

"No." Blitz said simply. "Not in many generations. It's kind of like the way you said some warriors trade for clothes, on a much larger scale."

"Oh," he nodded slowly, clearly taking some time to digest that concept. "Most people ... specialize? Have a skill they trade for what they need?"

"Exactly." Blitz nodded, pleased that he didn't have to explain the idea. "It works fairly well, since people can specialize in what they have both the talent and desire to do."

That brought another long moment of thought before Dawn nodded slowly. "As long as they have enough people to supply basic needs, I can see advantages. It must take a lot of organization to protect, though."

"It does, we have people who specialize in organizing things." Blitz nodded. "And it does break down at times. But it works pretty well most of the time."

"I think that is true of most things," he nodded slightly, still thinking about the whole idea.

"True." Blitz nodded. "It's very rare to find something that works all the time."

"Not even the seasons are so reliable." Dawn smiled softly and took the empty bowl. "Are you still hungry?"

"I think I'm good for now." Blitz said gratefully. "Between the food and the company, it's not so bad having to take it easy." He added.

"Thank you," the dark tabby blushed a bit. "Do you like to do anything that doesn't require much moving around?"

Blitz had to think for a while on that one. He'd never been good at sitting for long periods, and most of the things he did like to do in that vein involved tech that just didn't exist here. There was that game that Corwin had taught him, but he really doubted that these people had ever heard of it, and he didn't have the equipment with him anyway. Then an idea hit him though he wasn't sure, given the apparent lack of tech. After all, if these people really were as stone age as things appeared, even rudimentary metalworking didn't exist yet. "Closest I ever got to a hobby that didn't involve a lot of moving around was woodcarving." He said, after a bit of thinking.

"The decorative kind, like this?" Dawn twisted to pick up an elegantly carved mouse dancer in a dark brown wood, beautifully polished to a marble shine.

"That was the idea, yeah." Blitz said, admiring the artistry. "I'm not quite that good yet, though. But I also don't practice much." The Lynx admitted. "Your work?" He guessed with a smile for the young male.

"No, I'm not nearly so artistic." He explained and put it away. "My oldest sister made it for me, for taking care of her kits when she was at war. She's a warrior, like the Chief. She upset many a warrior when she challenged for the status. Quite a few wanted her for a wife."

"Apparently talent runs in your family." Blitz grinned. "And it's best to follow one's heart in such matters, even if it upset a few people." He said approvingly.

~ To Be Continued

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